



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Lords General Committee Debate

Anti-Semitism: University Campus Incidents

col 83GC Baroness Deech (Crossbench): To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the report by the Community Security Trust *Campus Antisemitism in Britain 2018–2020*, published on 17 December, and in particular, the finding that the number of anti-Semitic incidents in universities has increased. ...

I have spoken about campus anti-Semitism on previous occasions and sadly there is a great deal more to report. It is equally sad that an organisation such as the Community Security Trust, whose report we are debating, should have to exist at all. It is a charity that protects British Jews from anti-Semitism and provides security. How regrettable it is that every Jewish building and every Jewish gathering has to be protected by CST guards. I take this opportunity to thank the Government for the funding they provide to help the CST to continue to provide safeguards for the Jewish community.

The CST report uncovered the highest number of university anti-Semitic incidents ever recorded, notably online. Shockingly, they included anti-Semitic action by university staff—the very people who should be teaching students to reason and tolerate. Nothing leaves a Jewish student more unprotected than to find that the anti-Semitism he or she faces is from his or her lecturer, and that the panel set up by the authorities to investigate it is peopled by colleagues and devoid of Jewish members.

col 84GC The treatment meted out, the failure to discipline and the reaction would not be tolerated for a moment by other ethnic minorities. But somehow racist and religious prejudice against Jews is given short shrift, and its specific nature glossed over. ... In November, UUK put out a report on anti-racism in universities, but relegated anti-Semitism to a passing mention in a footnote. ...

There is light at the end of the tunnel ... more universities—about 51—are adopting the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, which has the effect of concentrating minds on its expression as well as its definition. ...

At Warwick University a student complained about a lecturer who dismissed the notion that the Labour Party could be anti-Semitic as an attempt to discredit it by the so-called Israel lobby. That lecturer emailed the whole class to suggest that claims of anti-Semitism against

Labour are orchestrated. Amazingly, it was the student who was then investigated by the university at length. ...

The School of Oriental and African Studies maintains its poisonous reputation for Jewish students. A Canadian student was forced to abandon his studies there because of the toxic atmosphere. He was branded a Nazi supremacist for disclosing his support for Israel and was refunded his £15,000 fees. At SOAS, others complained, being Jewish means you are called fascist. ...

Lecturers have spontaneously called the Holocaust "too Jewish" or indulged in the old slander of over-powerful conspiring Zionists. How ironic that the practice of no-platforming is so acceptable in universities but not when it comes to anti-Semitic speech. What an indictment of the failure to deal with the problem, that some Jewish students choose a university not by the course content or the quality of teaching but by the extent of anti-Semitism that they might encounter. ...

Legitimate criticism of Israel is to anti-Zionism what literary criticism is to book burning. I mention the Israel element because of the wise observations of the late Lord Sacks. Antisemitism, he said, mutates like a virus. It used to manifest itself as religious discrimination, then it was racial, and now it focuses on attacking the self-determination of the Jews in their only, tiny, state. ...

col 85GC Holocaust education, which is compulsory for schoolchildren, sadly has not worked. How is it possible that an entire generation who has studied the holocaust can arrive at university and behave in the ways I have outlined? It is because they have studied the Holocaust in a vacuum, as an example of generalised hate, and have resigned it to history. They have learned nothing about the contribution of Jews to civilisation, about the millennia of persecution, and how that, and religious teaching, led to genocide; they have not learned of the overwhelming need for a safe haven and how Jewish self-determination in Israel is the best protection against genocide in the modern world. All they learn is that Jews were killed in their millions and all they see is pictures of death camps and bodies. It is not surprising that the brute reaction of some is to replicate Nazi slogans when they vent their hatred at universities. There is a need to widen Holocaust education into education about Jewish history. That is why the planned Holocaust memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens, at a cost of over £100 million and a destroyed park, is such a wasted effort. It will present the Holocaust again as something in the past, something over there, not here. It will enable alleged anti-Semites to continue to pay their respects to 6 million dead Jews, badge themselves as anti-racist and then carry on attacking Jews of today and their only state, Israel. ...

col 86GC **Lord Mendelsohn (Labour):** ... alarming levels of anti-Semitism on campus are not new. It has been a profound problem since the mid-1970s. When I was a student in the 1980s, Jewish societies were being banned, at the instigation of those who saw themselves as progressive and liberal. ... for too long too little has been done to tackle students being radicalised and recruited to extremist ideas and politics with anti-Semitism at their centre, and the increasing role that academics play in propagation and denial of the problem. ...

Lord Greaves (Liberal Democrat): ... All forms of discrimination on the basis of identity are wrong. Some have greater resonance than others; quite clearly, for all the historical and present-day reasons we know, anti-Semitism is up there with the worst of them. However, it is simply one of the evils we have in today's world as a result of the increasing manifestation of politics of identity which are outward-looking and hostile towards individuals and groups. ...

col 87GC **Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Labour):** ... Much work has already been done in institutions on different forms of harassment and discrimination but Universities UK, representing all universities, accepts that more can always be done and that institutions should act swiftly on any reports of anti-Semitism. UUK's *Changing the*

Culture and Tackling Racial Harassment aim to galvanise the whole sector into thinking differently—less defensively and more proactively—about its approaches and policies that need to change. ...

Baroness Altmann (Conservative): ... I will focus on the need to improve university complaints procedures, which too often discourage students from reporting racism. Does my noble friend share my support for the CST report's recommendations, such as the need for independent oversight of complaints of discrimination so that experts involved in this area can be brought in, for complaints to be responded to in a reasonable timeframe, and to ask universities to permit third parties such as the UJS or CST to submit complaints on behalf of students? ...

col 88GC Lord Dodds of Duncairn (DUP): ... It is very disturbing that we find ourselves in 2021 with the number of anti-Semitic incidents recorded in our universities higher than ever before. I am particularly concerned about reports of anti-Semitic incidents perpetrated by academic staff, as has been mentioned, as well as by student union officers or student societies. Every student, regardless of background, is entitled to a rich and fulfilling university experience. It is vital that universities are made to act on the report's findings and recommendations. ...

Lord Pickles (Conservative): ... As the UK head of delegation to IHRA who persuaded the Prime Minister to adopt the definition, I am concerned that this non-legally-binding definition should be maliciously misrepresented as a constraint on either academic freedom or free speech. The definition expressly states that criticism of Israel is not anti-Semitic. If academics cannot find a way to criticise the Israeli Government without having to resort to anti-Semitic tropes, it speaks volumes to both their paucity of language and their real motivation. ...

col 89GC Baroness Falkner of Margravine (Crossbench): ... I and the noble Lord, Lord Mitchell, set up something called the Coexistence Trust some dozen years ago to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment at universities, and I deeply regret that the curse of this is still ongoing. However, I am afraid that I do not support the call for an IHRA definition: it is extremely poorly worded and probably unactionable in law. ... It directly conflicts with the duty on universities to protect free speech. But there is a further danger in this: when universities adopt this definition, the pressure on them increases also to adopt the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia's extremely badly worded definition of Islamophobia. ...

Lord Sheikh (Conservative): ... I find the CST's recommendations reasonable and support suggestions of an independent process for reporting alleged anti-Semitism and recognising the IHRA definition. ...

I strongly believe in building interfaith harmony, which is why I successfully took action when I was accused of anti-Semitism by Associated Newspapers last year. Discrimination against one group of people should be viewed as an attack on our community as a whole. We must all stand together to combat any form of racism. ...

col 90GC Lord Mann (Non-affiliated): My Lords, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the British police for the last nine years, Chelsea Football Club for the last two years, and universities, some for three years, have not just thought about the IHRA definition; they have used it. There are no examples of it restricting free speech in any way. ...

The IHRA creates a framework for democratic debate. We are the ones in favour of democratic debate and academic research, not those who are against it. Jewish students have a right to be themselves on a university campus. That is what the IHRA gives us. ...

Lord Wasserman (Conservative): ... I want to focus not on ways of tackling anti-Semitism on campus but on ways of helping Jewish students to live with it. I want to do this because I believe that, as our late colleague Lord Sacks used to say, anti-Semitism is a virus which has been around for thousands of years and is unlikely to disappear any time soon, whether from our universities or elsewhere. That is why I believe that we must do whatever

we can to make Jewish students in the UK feel secure and respected, so that when they graduate they will want to devote their talents and energy to making this country more prosperous and civilised. ...

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated): ... To have 123 incidents—and increasing—in two years is serious, and I must say I was shocked when I read the nature of the abuse.

What is missing, however, is any investigation into why these incidents are increasing. The graph in the report is very interesting, because it shows a sharp increase after the deadly attacks on Gaza in 2008-09 and 2014. Since then, with increasing violence in the West Bank and Gaza, the expansion of settlements and the occupation of east Jerusalem, anti-Semitic incidents have continued to rise.

Whenever I suggest a connection between the two, I am told this is “victim blame”, which it is not. The victims are innocent Jewish people—students, in this case. They are victims because of the illegal actions of the Israeli Government. ...

col 91GC Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated): ... one of the most egregious aspects of the indisputable rise of anti-Semitism on campus has been the way that elements of the left have exploited the well-meaning, progressive and radical instincts of so many students to deploy anti-Semitic myths. Whether it is the crass critique of capitalist injustice, with its gross, caricatured cabals of big bankers or, more pertinently, in the name of protecting oppressed groups, censorship is used to de-platform and disrupt Israeli speakers, to argue for academic boycotts or even, through the prism of identity politics, to treat all Jewish students as an undifferentiated blob representing privileged oppressors to be silenced. ...

Lord Grade of Yarmouth (Conservative): ... Criticism of Israel is usually healthy, especially in Israel itself. But there is a distinction between fair criticism and criticism that crosses that shocking line into race hate. Those across campuses who repeatedly voice their contempt for Israel and all it stands for reveal their prejudice by refusing ever to acknowledge any context.

col 92GC Israel is the only fully-fledged democracy in the Middle East. The country itself is threatened daily by Hezbollah, Hamas and Iranian-sponsored terrorism—never mentioned. Israel’s regard for constitutional and civil human rights—never mentioned. Israel has many times been poised to conclude a two-state peace treaty with the Palestinians only to be thwarted by the extremists who prefer terror to peace—never mentioned. Criticism that ignores this context is nothing but a thin veil to hide deep seated and ill-disguised hatred of the Jewish state and all Jews. Anti-Semitism has no place anywhere in Britain, but most especially in places of learning. ...

Lord Austin of Dudley (Non-affiliated): ... My Lords, I pay tribute to the CST for its crucial work in combating anti-Semitism. Its report’s most worrying aspect is staff making allegedly anti-Semitic comments, the impact on students they teach and on students who are too scared to complain. ... what will the Minister do to prevent academics spreading conspiracy theories and ensure that publicly funded universities recognised this problem and deal with it? Secondly, will they look at the contents of the report about Professor Miller and take this up with Bristol? What assessment has been made of how universities handle complaints, such as Warwick, and what discussions will they have with the vice-chancellor about it? What will they do about the obsession on campuses about Israel and the so-called Israel apartheid week, which is an insult not just to the Middle East’s only democracy but to black South Africans who suffered under apartheid? Finally, it is completely wrong for the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, to blame racism against Jewish people in Britain not on the racists responsible but on Israel. ...

Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative): ... I welcome the CST report, but we have to recognise that it covers only reported anti-Semitism, not the huge amount of non-reported anti-Semitism, much of it online and some of it well away from campus, but which still affects the mental health of Jewish students ...

col 94GC **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord Wolfson of Tredegar):** ... The importance of ensuring that our universities are free, so far as possible, from the scourge of anti-Semitism is something to which the Government give, as any Government must, the highest importance. I said “so far as possible” deliberately, because I recognise that, as we fight against all forms of discrimination, the battle against anti-Semitism may never be finally won. ...

Universities should be at the forefront of tackling anti-Semitism, which manifests itself both as religious hatred and as racism. Their duty is to ensure that higher education is a genuinely fulfilling and welcoming experience for all. ...

col 95GC The simple reason why antisemitism is wrong—and this goes for all forms of racism—is because it is unjust. That is why this Government expects higher education providers and their leaders to take a zero-tolerance approach to antisemitism. ... Where providers have failed in their duty to investigate and adjudicate complaints about antisemitism fairly and consistently ... that is unacceptable. Universities and other higher education providers are independent and autonomous, but their independence and autonomy does not mean they are unaccountable. ...

Racism is the antithesis of debate. An anti-Semite does not want to hear what you say; when anti-Semitism goes unchecked at a university, it means a young person’s voice is silenced. I therefore welcome the report’s recommendation that providers adopt the working definition of anti-Semitism set out by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. ... This Government have taken decisive action in encouraging its adoption; since October, when the Secretary of State for Education wrote to all providers in England to encourage them to adopt it, at least 27 additional institutions have done so. ...

col 96GC ... if institutions do not demonstrate that they are taking their responsibilities seriously, we will consider going further to ensure that all providers are tackling anti-Semitism. ... The right to discuss all kinds of issues, including those that might be uncomfortable or even offensive to some, is an integral part of higher education. ... However, freedom of speech protections can never justify a lack of action from providers in confronting racism and anti-Semitism on campus. ...

I welcome the findings of the CST’s report. Many institutions have provided strong support to Jewish students, who also benefit, as has been mentioned, from the sterling work of the University Jewish Chaplaincy. However, the report demonstrates that, despite all our efforts over many years, anti-Semitism persists in our higher education system. The number of anti-Semitic incidents in our universities has become a real cause for concern. Therefore, we again call on leaders across the sector to do more to ensure a zero-tolerance approach is now taken. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-01-21/debates/C3E8CDFD-8212-4EFC-8DE4-43B2B0F8C2C8/Anti-SemitismUniversityCampusIncidents>

The CST report referred to above can be read at

<https://cst.org.uk/data/file/3/6/Antisemitism%20on%20University%20Campuses.1609855878.pdf>

The UUK report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2020/tackling-racial-harassment-in-higher-education.pdf>

House of Commons Written Answer

Animal Welfare

Henry Smith (Conservative) [911180] When he plans to bring forward legislative proposals on animal sentience.

Victoria Prentis: We have committed to bringing in new laws on animal sentience.

Any necessary changes required to domestic legislation will be made in an effective and credible way and will be brought forward when parliamentary time allows.
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-21/911180>

Public Health England and Department of Health and Social Care

COVID-19: Updated guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

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Israel

See also the House of Lords debate “Anti-Semitism: University Campus Incidents” that is included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Written Answers

Arms Trade: Israel

Janet Daby (Labour) [140254] To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent amendments her Department has made to export controls in the context of the potential provision of armaments to the Israeli Government.

Ranil Jayawardena: The Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (the “Consolidated Criteria”) remains the policy for assessing all licence applications on a case-by-case basis.

The Consolidated Criteria has long provided a thorough risk assessment framework and requires us to assess the impact of licensing equipment and its capabilities. HM Government will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with the Consolidated Criteria

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-19/140254>

The Consolidated Criteria, referred to above, can be read at

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140325/wmstext/140325m001.htm#14032566000018>

Palestinians: Schools

Andrew Bowie (Conservative) [138478] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the quality of the education received by Palestinian children in schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

James Cleverly: FCDO uses a variety of tools to monitor UNRWA's performance and ensure it continues to deliver quality services including via programme monitoring and annual assessments. UNRWA has a robust review system of each host country's textbooks to ensure education in its schools reflects the values and principles of the UN. We accompany our support to UNRWA with stringent attention to implementation of their neutrality policy, including how they apply this to textbooks.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-15/138478>

Occupied Territories: Education

Andrew Bowie (Conservative) [138479] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to prevent UK support for education in the West Bank and Gaza being undermined by extremist educational material.

James Cleverly: The UK does not fund textbooks in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). UK Aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) contributes to the salaries of carefully vetted teachers/education workers.

An independent review of the content in Palestinian textbooks led by our European partners is currently underway. The study is due to be completed in early 2021. We continue to press our European partners to complete the review as soon as possible.

We have a regular dialogue with the PA in which we raise concerns about allegations of inappropriate content in textbooks. We continue to urge the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to avoid engaging in, or encouraging, any type of action and language that makes it more difficult to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-15/138479>

The following three questions both received the same answer

Palestinians: Evictions

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat) [137143] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to protect the 156 Palestinian families in occupied East Jerusalem from eviction and forced transfer.

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat) [137144] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to evictions of Palestinian families and the expansion of settlements in occupied East Jerusalem, what representations his Department has made to the Israeli authorities on reviewing the Absentees' Property Law and the Administrative Matters Law in that country.

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat) [137145] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the Government's policy is on the responsibility of the Israeli Government for the eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan and throughout occupied East Jerusalem, notwithstanding the involvement of private settler organisations in that matter.

James Cleverly: We continue to be concerned by the impact of evictions on ordinary Palestinians and the viability of a future Palestinian state. We regularly make clear our serious concerns about the evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem to the Israeli authorities and the Municipality of Jerusalem, both bilaterally and in co-operation with like-minded diplomatic partners. The Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to all occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, prohibits demolitions or forced evictions absent military necessity. Evictions of Palestinians from their homes cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians, call into question Israel's commitment to a viable two-state solution and, in all but the most exceptional of cases, are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. I raised our concern about the eviction of Palestinians from their homes, with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 29 October 2020, and the British Embassy in Tel Aviv raises this issue regularly with the Israeli authorities. On 25 November 2020, the UK Consul General Jerusalem visited families at risk of eviction in Sheikh Jarrah, restating UK opposition to evictions of Palestinians from their homes. The UK is focused on preventing demolitions and evictions from happening in the first place through our legal aid programme, which supports Bedouin communities and Palestinians facing demolition or home eviction in both

the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We continue to urge the Government of Israel to develop improved mechanisms for zoning, planning and permitting in Area C for the benefit of the Palestinian population, including by facilitating local Palestinian participation in such processes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-13/137143>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-13/137144>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-13/137145>

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Other Relevant Information

United Nations

Calling for Greater Efforts to Promote Culture of Tolerance, General Assembly Adopts Resolution Condemning Offences against Religious Sites

Calling for greater efforts to promote a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, the General Assembly adopted a resolution ... inviting the Secretary-General to convene a global conference aimed at advancing the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, involving Governments, political figures, religious leaders, civil society and the media, among other stakeholders.

Introducing the draft resolution titled, "Promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites" (document A/75/L.54), the representative of Saudi Arabia said the text condemns offences or mockery against religious sites and symbols, rejects the use of violence to express any point of view and aims to develop a culture of peace as a shield against extremism and intolerance. ...

By other terms of the resolution — which the Assembly adopted without a vote — Member States denounced any moves to obliterate or forcibly convert religious sites, while strongly deploring violence against persons on the basis of their religion or belief. Expressing concern that racial and religious intolerance and stereotyping are on the rise, the Assembly condemned any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, and urged States to take effective measures to combat such incidents. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/ga12310.doc.htm>

Promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites

(document A/75/L.54)

<https://undocs.org/A/75/L.54>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2622>

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2592>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2579>

Freedom of Speech (Universities) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2820>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2621>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2608>

Marriage (Approved Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2537>

Marriage (Authorised Belief Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2795>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2584>

Scottish Parliament

Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/domestic-abuse-protection-scotland-bill>

**** Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill**

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill>

Notice of amendments

<https://beta.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/current-bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill/stage-2/daily-list-of-amendments-22-january-2021.pdf>

Post-mortem Examinations (Defence Time Limit) (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/post-mortem-examinations-defence-time-limit-scotland-bill>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Introduction of a statutory opt-out system for organ donation for Northern Ireland
(closing date 19 February 2021)

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/organ-donation>

Human Rights Act Review (closing date 3 March 2021)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/93/human-rights-joint-committee/news/138635/call-for-evidence-the-governments-independent-human-rights-act-review/>

Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19

(closing date not stated)

<https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/>

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